

News in brief

◆ **Defence Minister Israel**
Katz vowed yesterday that Israel would remain in Gaza and pledged to establish outposts there, but his office swiftly downplayed the remarks made at a settlement in the occupied West Bank. In comments reported across Israeli media, Katz said Israel “will never leave” the devastated Palestinian territory. His remarks come as mediators are pressing for the implementation of the next phases of a fragile ceasefire in Gaza, which would involve an Israeli withdrawal from the territory. US President Donald Trump’s 20-point plan for the truce stated that “Israel will not occupy or annex Gaza.” Speaking at an event in the Israeli settlement of Beit El in the West Bank, Katz said: “We are deep inside Gaza, and we will never leave Gaza -- there will be no such thing.” “We are there to protect, to prevent what happened” from happening again, he added, according to a video published by Israeli news site Ynet.



Israel defence minister vows to establish outposts in Gaza

◆ **UK man, five others accused of sex offences against ex-wife appear in court**

other men charged with various sexual offences against her, appeared yesterday in a UK court. Philip Young spoke only to confirm his name and other details when he appeared separately at Swindon Magistrates Court, west of London, for his first hearing. The 49-year-old, reportedly a former Conservative councillor, was remanded in custody ahead of the next hearing at Swindon Crown Court on January 23. He was not required to enter a plea at this stage. He is charged with 56 offences, including rape and administering a substance with intent to stupefy his 48-year-old former spouse Joanne Young, who has waived her legal right to anonymity. Voyeurism, possession of indecent images of children and possession of extreme images are among the other charges filed against Young. The alleged offences occurred between 2010 and 2023. Later Tuesday, five other men -- aged 31 to 61 -- appeared in the same magistrates’ courtroom to hear the charges against them.

◆ **A British man** accused of drugging and raping his ex-wife over 13 years, and five

Egypt’s grand museum begins live restoration of ancient boat

◆ **Egypt began** a public live restoration of King Khufu’s ancient solar boat at the newly-opened Grand Egyptian Museum yesterday, more than 4,000 years after the vessel was first built. Egyptian conservators used a small crane to carefully lift a fragile, decayed plank into the Solar Boats Museum hall -- the first of 1,650 wooden pieces that make up the ceremonial boat of the Old Kingdom pharaoh. The 4,600-year-old boat was built during the reign of King Khufu, the pharaoh who also commissioned the Great Pyramid of Giza.



SPOTLIGHT

Egypt high-speed trains to connect Red Sea, Mediterranean



A man walks with a suitcase at Cairo Central Station
AFP | New Administrative Capital, Egypt

Workers have started laying tracks in the desert east of Cairo for Egypt’s first high-speed train, which will link the Red Sea and the Mediterranean in the latest attempt to modernise transport in the vast country.

Described by transport minister Kamel al-Wazir as a “new Suez Canal on rails”, the project is slated to be completed in 2028, and will carry passengers and cargo the 660-kilometre (410-mile) distance in as little as three hours.

The Green Line, as it is known, is the latest of a long list of megaprojects undertaken by Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi’s government in the past decade -- the crowning jewel of which is a still sparsely populated \$58 billion New Administrative Capital east of Cairo.

In 2021, Egypt signed a \$4.5

billion contract with a consortium that includes German company Siemens to establish the Green Line, which will form the first of three high-speed tracks across the country.

Authorities hope the nearly 2,000 kilometre-network will carry 1.5 million passengers per day.

Egypt’s existing train network -- used by a million people every day -- is plagued by infrastructure and maintenance problems that caused nearly 200 accidents last year, according to official figures.

The Green Line will run across the country’s north, from Ain Sokhna on the Red Sea to Marsa Matrouh on the Mediterranean, crossing two Cairo satellite cities -- the New Administrative Capital to the east, and to the west 6th of October City, home to Egypt’s only dry port.

Israel tightening control over West Bank with new settlements

More than 500,000 Israelis live in the West Bank

● **19 newly approved settlements** were located

● **Five of the 19 settlements** already existed

● **Israel has occupied the territory** since 1967

AFP | Ramallah, Palestinian Territories

The Palestinian Authority condemned yesterday Israel’s recent approval of 19 settlements in the occupied West Bank, accusing it of tightening its control over Palestinian land.

On Sunday, Israel’s far-right Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich announced the authorities had greenlit the settlements, saying the move was aimed at preventing the establishment of a Palestinian state.

The Ramallah-based Palestinian foreign ministry decried the approval as a “dangerous step aimed at tightening colonial control over the entirety of Palestinian land”, calling it a continuation of “apartheid, settlement, and annexation policies that undermine the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people”.

“The decision provides political cover for accelerating the plunder of Palestinian lands, expanding settlement infrastructure... alongside an escalating pace of settler terrorism against members of our people and their properties,” it said in a statement.



Israeli bulldozers break ground on land belonging to Palestinian Etaf jaradat from Silat al-Harithiya to reportedly make way for the construction of settlements in the Sarouj area, located between the towns of Silat al-Harithiya and Yamoun, west of Jenin in the occupied west bank

A Palestinian woman, Etaf jaradat from Silat al-Harithiya, watches from a hill as Israeli bulldozers work in her land



The latest move brings the total number of settlements approved over the past three years to 69, Smotrich’s office said.

Excluding east Jerusalem, which was occupied and annexed by Israel in 1967, more than 500,000 Israelis live in the West Bank, along with about three million Palestinian residents.

Smotrich’s office said the 19 newly approved settlements were located in what it described as “highly strategic” areas, adding that two of them -- Ganim and Kadim in the northern West Bank -- would be re-established after being dismantled two decades ago.

Five of the 19 settlements already existed but had not previously been granted legal status under Israeli law, the statement said.

Israel’s decision came days after the United Nations said the expansion of Israeli settlements in the West Bank -- all of which are illegal under international law -- had reached its highest level since at least 2017.

US President Donald Trump recently warned that Israel “would lose all of its support from the United States” if it annexed the West Bank.

Israel has occupied the territory since 1967, and violence there

has surged following the outbreak of the Gaza war in October 2023 with Hamas’s attack on Israel.

Israeli troops or settlers have killed at least 1,028 Palestinians in the West Bank -- both militants and civilians -- since the start of the fighting in Gaza, according to an AFP tally based on Palestinian health ministry figures.

At least 44 Israelis have been killed in the West Bank in Palestinian attacks or Israeli military operations during the same period, according to Israeli data.

Greta Thunberg arrested at pro-Palestinian protest in London

AFP | London, United Kingdom

London police yesterday arrested Swedish activist Greta Thunberg at a demonstration in support of pro-Palestinian hunger strikers, Palestinian activist groups said.

Thunberg’s arrest makes her the highest profile person to be detained by police since the government banned the Palestine Action group under anti-terror laws.

“Greta Thunberg was arrested under the Terrorism Act at the Prisoners for Palestine lock-on protest,” Prisoners for Palestine said in a statement.

Thunberg was holding a sign reading “I support the Palestine Action prisoners. I oppose genocide”, it added.

The 22-year-old was among hundreds of people who boarded a flotilla in October that tried to break through the Israeli blockade of Gaza.

City of London Police said officers had arrested three people on suspicion of criminal damage



Swedish activist Greta Thunberg before her arrest by Police officers outside the offices of Aspen Insurance at Plantation Place on Fenchurch Street.

at a building in London’s financial quarter.

It said the arrests came after “hammers and red paint were used to damage a building”.

“A man and a woman have been arrested on suspicion of criminal damage. They glued themselves nearby and specialist officers are working to

release them, and bring them into police custody,” a statement said.

“A little while later, a 22-year-old woman also attended the scene. She has been arrested for displaying an item (in this case a placard) in support of a proscribed organisation (in this case Palestine Action) contrary



Greta’s global climate movement began entirely on her own: in August 2018, at just 15 years old, she sat alone outside the Swedish Parliament with a handmade sign reading “School strike for climate.” Within months, that solitary protest inspired millions of students across more than 150 countries to take part in what became the Fridays for Future movement -- one of the largest youth-led climate actions in history.

to Section 13 of the Terrorism Act 2000,” it added.